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DEPT FOR SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, S/CRS  
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY WILLIAMSON MEETING WITH SENIOR SPLM IN  
KHARTOUM

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Special Envoy Richard Williamson met with the senior leadership of the SPLM in Khartoum on May 31 to discuss progress on the implementation of the CPA, the crisis in Abyei, and the need for better coordination between the SPLM and the United States in dealing with the National Congress Party (NCP). SPLM attendees included Vice President of the Government of Southern Sudan Riek Machar, the Deputy Secretary General of the Northern Sector of the SPLM Yasir Arman, GoNU Foreign Minister Deng Alor, Governor of Blue Nile State Malik Agar, Minister of Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng, and GOSS Minister for Legal Affairs and Constitutional Development Michael Makuei.

¶2. (SBU) Special Envoy Williamson opened the meeting by describing the devastation he had witnessed in the town of Abyei, the scene of recent fighting between SPLA and SAF units. Ambassador Williamson expressed his view that no party is entirely at fault and no party is entirely innocent - but that one part is probably more guilty than the other. The leadership of GOSS President Salva Kiir during the crisis, on the other hand, had been outstanding and his restraint had prevented the situation from spiraling out of control into war. The status of the CPA, however, was fragile, and immediate steps needed to be taken to lower the risks to peace. First and foremost, a way had to be found to provide security in Abyei so as to reduce tensions and the potential for another incident that could spark a war.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador Williamson offered the services of the United States in helping to defuse the crisis, but he emphasized that the U.S. would not impose a solution on the parties. Success in negotiations would require both sides to embrace the decisions reached. However, he recognized the problems the SPLM faced in dealing with the NCP, and offered to help focus the attention of the NCP on the consequences of a failure to follow through on commitments. This could be done by using the tragedy of Abyei to rally the support of the international community and the United Nations to deal with the issue. With the presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), beginning on June 1, the U.S. would be well placed to focus attention on Sudan. Ambassador Williamson reiterated support for GOSS President Salva Kiir, and said the United States backs his decision to not let the CPA collapse.

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador Williamson next expressed his disappointment with the SPLM decision to withdraw from the talks he was about to hold with the Khartoum government. Describing the GOSS as a friend and ally, Ambassador Williamson said that if the U.S. was to work with the SPLM on securing the CPA and supporting the GOSS, the SPLM, he said, had to be prepared to work closely with us. Withdrawing from the U.S. - GOS dialog without informing him not only treated the U.S. with disrespect, but being blindsided by the announcement had undermined trust that the SPLM is a reliable negotiating partner. Williamson said he was disappointed they pulled out of the dialog, and he was disappointed he had learned of this decision from the media. It had the appearance to trying to dictate to the U.S.

who it could talk to and who it could not, and the U.S. would not be dictated to by anyone. Williamson emphasized that this breach of trust must not happen again.

¶15. (SBU) Finally, Ambassador Williamson once again praised the actions of President Kiir in Abyei in avoiding a war, quoting Kiir as telling him, "We do not want to be responsible for the collapse of the CPA." The Ambassador pointedly asked the assembled SPLM leaders if they supported Kiir in this regard and in his handling of Abyei.

¶16. (SBU) Vice President Riek Machar responded that the SPLM was committed to the CPA, that the GOSS was committed to the CPA, and that he and the others present all backed President Kiir in his handling of the Abyei crisis. The theme of the recently completed SPLM convention had been, he said, "No to war and yes to New Sudan." "Our people suffered in Abyei," he continued, "and we could have used force to settle it, but we did not." However, the Abyei border was to have been settled by the Abyei Border Commission (ABC) report, which the NCP had rejected two years ago in violation of the terms of the CPA. Since then, the SPLM had tried to negotiate a settlement, offering many interim solutions, but all had been rejected. The NCP, he said, had created the crisis. Machar implied that the timing of the Abyei fighting was, in fact, no accident, but a deliberate attempt by the NCP to provoke the SPLM into war before the Special Envoy was due to arrive in Khartoum. The NCP feared the pressure that Williamson could bring to bear on the regime, and hoped the SPLM would start a war to remove that pressure. However, the SPLM had refused to be provoked.

¶17. (SBU) The decision to withdraw from the talks had not been intended to undercut the Special Envoy or President Bush, but had been taken because of the events in Abyei. Peace in Darfur and the

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full implementation of the CPA all depended upon actions that had to be taken by the NCP, not the SPLM. The people of the South did not understand why the SPLM would do anything to aid the NCP in improving its relations with the U.S. after what had happened in Abyei.

¶18. (SBU) Last, Machar pointed out that President Bashir had just announced that it would take at least two years to establish a lasting peace in Darfur, which was his underhanded way of announcing that Darfur would not participate in the national elections in 2009. Blocking Darfurians from voting, of course, helped the NCP in national elections, since it removed a base of support for the SPLM.

¶19. (SBU) Foreign Minister Deng Alor next told the Special Envoy, "We almost went to war over Abyei. Salva kept it from happening, but we can be forced to war in self defense." He agreed with the Vice President that it had, in fact, been the intention of the NCP to provoke the SPLM into a war, but their plan had not worked. He regretted that the Ambassador had not been informed of the decision by the SPLM to withdraw from the normalization talks, but said that he had informed the State Department of the action in advance.

¶110. (SBU) The NCP was uncomfortable without the SPLM in the talks, he continued, which he thought was having a positive impact on their willingness to resolve the Abyei crisis. "They want us back because we give them credibility in the talks with you." The purpose of withdrawing was not to embarrass the U.S., or to try to dictate who Williamson could talk to, but to leverage the NCP's need for the SPLM's help in improving relations with the U.S. to force them to end the Abyei crisis.

¶111. (SBU) What the NCP wanted on Abyei, he continued, was to submit the question to arbitration. The problem was that the ABC report on the Abyei border was already the result of binding arbitration, as specified in the CPA, and all the NCP really wanted was to keep arguing the case until it got a decision it liked. When he had begun his term as the Foreign Minister for the GoNU, Bashir had told him that he would implement the ABC report. He had not. This was typical of how the NCP operated -- say one thing, do another. "We need your intervention," Alor said. "If you don't, war is the

likely outcome. We don't want it, but tensions will overwhelm us."

¶12. (SBU) The rest of the SPLM delegation echoed the sentiments of the Vice President and Foreign Minister, except that Yasir Arman pointed out that following the JEM attacks on Khartoum, the NCP had been victimizing all Darfurians in the city. Captured JEM leaders were also being tortured, and this harassment and abuse of prisoners had to stop.

¶13. (SBU) Ambassador Williamson responded by reiterating that the US interest in Sudan was security and stability for all. There were many issues related to the CPA that needed attention, but the most pressing were the need to hold elections in 2009 and to hold the Southern referendum on self determination in 2011. We had supported the people of Southern Sudan in the past, he said, and would do so again. We were contributing to the professionalization of the SPLA, as well as to humanitarian and development assistance.

¶14. (SBU) The Ambassador repeated that the crisis in Abyei might well present an opportunity to galvanize the international community and the UN into action, and the U.S. was ready to help make that happen, but the hard work of resolving the situation was up to the parties involved. "We will not try to impose solutions." Further, we must be asked to help so that it was clear that the SPLM wanted the U.S. involved. If we were asked, then the SPLM must be prepared to work closely and collaboratively with us. It was not enough for the Foreign Minister to say that he had informed the State Department of a decision on a matter that directly involved the Special Envoy. They all had his telephone number and they needed to call him directly. He had called all of them on many occasions to coordinate his actions with them. They needed to reciprocate that level of coordination. Even if they decided to take a path different from the Americans on an issue (and friends could disagree from time to time), they must reach out and talk to him before acting or his efforts on their behalf would fail. On the subject of Abyei, the Ambassador said if the SPLM wanted U.S. help, they should make a public request for assistance or he would take no further action in this regard. He stressed that unless both the NCP and SPLM both felt ownership of the issue, effort as resolution will not succeed. The SPLM delegation agreed to make such a request immediately.

¶15. (U) S/E Williamson's delegation reviewed this message before transmission.

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